Analysis of "Bonny Barbara Allen"

Step 1, 2, 3

The title focusses on a proper name: The one of a girl. It also relies on an alliteration of the sound "b" ("Bonny Barbara"). The reader may be curious to find out why the poet decided to write a ballad about the young girl. Considering the layout, the intelligent reader realizes the poem is arranged into eight quatreins. From the analysis, he or she can realize that the name of Barbara Allen is repeated five times in eight stsnzas and therefore he or she may now realize that not only is Barbara Allen the focus of the text, but that she is also present repeatedly like a refrain. In addition, the reader notices that line 2 and line 4 rhyme and therefore he or she may expect repetition is a significant feature of the poem. It recalls features of a song. The ballad is set in autumn and tells about Sir John's love for Barbara Allen, a young lady living in the countryside. He is going to die and he wants to meet the girl one last time and that is why he sends his men to ask Barbara to go and visit him. The lady is reluctant to go but she accepts to see him at last. Unfortunately, she tells him that his death would be better for her. She reminds him of one dinner they had together when he drunks so much and he was probably poisonned. His head he said was going round and round. It doesn't take long for him to die and therefore he greets all his friends and asks them to be kind with Barbara. As soon as he left the world, Barbara started to realize to be aware that she was sad for his death. The tragic atmosphere is highlighted by the dead bell of the town where Sir John used to live. The bell itself seemed to cry Sir John's love for Barbara Allen.

Step 4.1

A connotative analysis of the level of sound displays the poet has resorted to frequent sound devices to make the text memorable and to focuss on the tragic atmosphere of the story. It succeeded in getting this effect by means of a frequent use of the refrain: Barbara Allen is repeated over and over again, so that the listener or the dancer cannot forget that the protagonist of the text and the keeper of Sir John's love is a young girl, who has also the simbolic name of Barbara. The name becomes symbolic because it is the reason why the aristocratic man of the town is on the point to die. Barbara is not only Barbara, she is also "Bonny". The informed reader indeed knows also that "bonny" means both beautiful or nice looking and vigourous and strong and, to tell the truth, Barbara will survive even if she eventually suffer while Sir John despites all his possibilities, being he a man of other thing. This explains for the ballad to be a tragic love story. It conforms to all the conventions of the Middle Ages, both on the social and cultural level and on the literary level . According on the social standards of the time it was always women the ones who were cruel and guilty if they didn't follow men's expectation. Indeed, during the Middle Ages and ever later as well, you can find no literary works which dear with woman's tragic pain.

Step 4.2

If you consider the semantic level of the ballad, you will easily realize it is written in very simple language, so that the common people may understand it; the ballad also displays the use of dialets and the Scottish dialet to be more precise. The tragic love story it dears with is set on autumn "at Martinmas time". The choice of using the phraise "Martinmas time" returns to the reader the idea of the importance of the religious code in society. Also it underlines how ordinary life was ruled by the cycles of nature. In order to create the setting and with the aim of introducing the characters, the narrator proviced the reader just a few sketches that are, anyway, enough to suggest the seen and the situation. You can understand that if you consider that " the Martinmas time" ( line 1) and " when the green leaves were a-falling" suffice to create the seasonal background. As for the characters the narrator adopts the same style: One of the protagonists is simply Sir John Graeme in the West country ( line 3). The ballad starts in a way similar to a fable, thus drawing the attention of the listeners immediately. Indeed, " it was in and about" reminds the conventional "once upon a time". The idea to use simple language to reach the audience is functional to create a main picture of the story told. Consider for example the following lexical high tense: "country" ( line 3), "town"( line 5), "place" (line 6), "plays" (line 10). They are all together words easy to remember and very clear to the mind of the listeners. There is no decriptive intent in the text: What matters here is the story and therefore narration and situation. What the narrator is looking for is to allow the listeners of the ballad to create a very clear idea of what is going on in society and, to be more precise, the society of the time, where and when there was a rigid strict cut division in social classes. If it weren't so, there wouldn't be no need for the narrator to use three words to refear to a character who is always catched.

Step 4.3

Examples of deviation in Bonny Barbara Allen: Lines 3-4, line 9, line 13.